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1967/10/05

MEMORANDUM

109

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 6, 1967
2:00 p.m.

PENN

LBJ mg JK + B

~~TOP SECRET~~
EYES ONLY

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson
Tom

Attached are the notes of your meeting with Secretary McNamara, Secretary Rusk and Walt Rostow on October 5, 1967, in the Cabinet Room.

The meeting began at 6:55 p.m. The meeting ended at 8:25 p.m.

Attachment.

~~TOP SECRET~~
EYES ONLY

DETERMINED TO BE AN
ADMINISTRATIVE MARKING
BY DCH ON 12-11-81

Meeting began: 6:55 p.m.
Meeting ended: 8:25 p.m.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH
SECRETARY McNAMARA
SECRETARY RUSK
WALT ROSTOW

October 5, 1967
President's Office

SECRETARY RUSK: Bill Bundy will see Kisinger in Boston Friday. We propose to transmit the complete text of this message (a copy of which only the President, Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara had in their possession.) This will be a message from Kisinger to Bo.

THE PRESIDENT: It appears to me that we delete our assumption in here; if they attack us during the talks what would happen?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: We would open fire, of course.

THE PRESIDENT: Wouldn't that be acting in bad faith if we do not state it in plain terms in this message that we assume they will not take advantage of the bombing cessation?

SECRETARY RUSK: If major operations began against us, we would be justified in striking back.

THE PRESIDENT: I think it is important we know what we are saying, and they know what we are saying. For example, what does "cessation" mean?

SECRETARY RUSK: It is deliberately ambiguous.

THE PRESIDENT: Is the only real danger to us at the DMZ?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, there are some dangers elsewhere.

THE PRESIDENT: But if they do open up, we will be able to fire back?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Yes, We would be well justified in the eyes of the world to resume bombing if they did that.

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Authority NLJ 82-60
By LCL, NARA, Date 8-13-84

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SECRETARY RUSK: Asked for a copy of the San Antonio speech. The Secretary said it is a question of how precise we should be in the language of this.

THE PRESIDENT: It still looks to me like you take out my assumption. I propose you delete the phrase "without the expression of conditions." What I want them to know is that I will stop the bombing and enter negotiations which are prompt and productive. We have always assumed that they would not take advantage of the bombing. Let's not let them say that we have retracted our assumption.

This proposal may lead them to a meeting, but it may lead me into a trap.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: They have not contracted not to take advantage of the pause. In other words talks could go on while the level of current fighting continues -- just so long as they do not increase it.

SECRETARY RUSK: They can come back after this message and debate anything they want to.

MR. ROSTOW: None of us believe that the private assumption is forgotten.

THE PRESIDENT: I know I will be charged with bad faith if they enter talks then begin firing at us. I must respond. I don't think this message gives me room to respond.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Nothing says they cannot shell our troops at the present level, it's just that they cannot shell them at an increased level.

THE PRESIDENT: I want talks which I can depend on. I think they would be taking advantage of it if they shell on the DMZ.

SECRETARY RUSK: Then I propose that we insert in the first paragraph "the U.S. government is prepared, in accordance with its proposal of August 25 . . ."

THE PRESIDENT: If we cannot agree among ourselves we sure cannot get them to agree.

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MR. ROSTOW: I would prefer to have it expressly stated in the agreement.

SECRETARY RUSK: I think the matter is taken care of by inserting "in accordance with our position of August 25." Our proposal of August 25 would incorporate the assumption that they would not take advantage of the bombing cessation.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: I would agree with that, leaving in the phrase, "without expression of conditions."

SECRETARY RUSK: If they are not enticed by this, we do not see this (the bombing cessation) coming before the first week before November. So we have sometime here to work with.

In the face of the August 25 proposal, Bo seems very anxious to keep the channel open. I do not believe Hanoi is doing this just for the fun of it.

THE PRESIDENT: Well they have escaped the bombing in Hanoi just because two professors are meeting. August 23 is the last time Hanoi was hit. Does that message (referring to the proposed message which was to be transmitted from Kisinger to Bo) include the halt of the August 25 assumption?

SECRETARY RUSK: It takes in the full proposal by saying "in accordance with."

THE PRESIDENT: What if we sat down in Paris on Monday and they began shelling?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: You can shoot back or bomb in the vicinity of the DMZ if they shell us.

THE PRESIDENT: Then we are trading all bombing for talks but we would expect to take any action necessary if they begin to shell us in the DMZ.

How long would it take? What if they re-arm, re-equip, or re-fortify?

SECRETARY RUSK: It would be just like another pause unless it turns into peace.

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We will know within two weeks if they are beginning a major re-supply effort. The first thing we should demand if we get to negotiate is for the complete demilitarization of the DMZ. Remember, the bombing in Laos would continue.

THE PRESIDENT: Rivers came down here this morning and gave me a report in which he said we have got to "give them everything we've got." He said in the last pause we permitted re-supply which cost many U.S. lives.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: There is just not one piece of evidence which would substantiate that, Mr. President.

SECRETARY RUSK: But we will have a problem of how to handle our own people.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: If you think you've got problems, you can imagine what sort of problems I will have with the military. All we can point to is the silence along the DMZ.

THE PRESIDENT: What do you think is responsible for the silence there tonight?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: I believe it is a combination of artillery and the B-52s, but principally the artillery is responsible.

MR. ROSTOW: But the B-52s laid down a very good carpet.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Artillery is more effective.

SECRETARY RUSK: The effect of the B-52s on morale is very direct.

THE PRESIDENT: What would General Wheeler say about all this?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: I believe he would be for it if no military advantage were taken.

THE PRESIDENT: Have you discussed it with him?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, with his physical condition I would not think it wise.

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm for stopping the bombing but I want them to know that we can get back into position if we need to.

SECRETARY RUSK: We'll shoot back if they shoot at us.

MR. ROSTOW: I do not think we are dealing with children. They want one of four things:

(1) An umbrella under which to rebuild
(2) Peace and quiet in Hanoi for awhile
(3) Panmumjon-like discussions
(4) They really want peace in line with their earlier communication.

THE PRESIDENT: We must put them on notice that the assumption still holds.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: But I would leave in "without expression of condition" because they want no conditions.

SECRETARY RUSK: I think it should stay in, too.

THE PRESIDENT: I guess that is because it makes it a little more appealing to them.

SECRETARY RUSK: We should go at this thing on a day to day basis. We might have an announcement that there was no air activity over the North today and repeat the same thing for several days without getting ourselves into a bind.

THE PRESIDENT: Bob, would you talk to General Wheeler about this? I want to get Wheeler aboard. On the last pause, he did not favor it but he was willing to defend the decision.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: I will talk to him first thing in the morning.

THE PRESIDENT: Otherwise, I am a man without a country.

SECRETARY RUSK: I just want everybody to know that my sniffer doesn't smell peace yet.

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THE PRESIDENT: This is going to be much worse in terms of the pressure on us than the 37-day pause.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Yes, much worse.

THE PRESIDENT: I honestly do not see how Senator Dirksen, at 72, from Chicago, can stand up and be my defender the way he has been.

SECRETARY RUSK: He has a little stronger chemical in his system than others.

THE PRESIDENT: Quoted parts of the James McGregor Burns book on Kennedy's quotes about the toughness of the times ahead.

The President read his speech which is scheduled for Saturday night at a Salute to the President in Washington.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Left before the speech was concluded because of another engagement.

SECRETARY RUSK: Said he thought it was an outstanding speech.

SECRETARY RUSK: Federal troops are making major headway in Nigeria.

MR. ROSTOW: When should Senator Dirksen and Senator Mansfield be told about this track?

THE PRESIDENT: Not until we have something.

SECRETARY RUSK: We do not know if we have anything yet.

MR. ROSTOW: We are coming to a stage when we can begin to put the war to the American people in a new way.

We have achieved self-determination in South Vietnam. We have pushed the North Vietnamese into the North. There are no more interior bases in South Vietnam.

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What we need to do is to stop the second war now. This is the war in the North. This is a need for the infiltartion to stop. This is a second job.

We can split the war into two pieces and give the war a new look by building up a new informational program.

THE PRESIDENT: Speaking of information programs, we killed ourselves today with that announcement that we had 100,000 casualties. Why didn't they say 80,000 were returned to duty? I have been trying to get the correct figures out for a long time.

SECRETARY RUSK: Do you have any speech information on Rockefeller's position?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I think you (Secretary Rusk) should make a series of speeches and talk about "the birth of a nation" and the five elections that have been held in Vietnam this year. We should talk about Honolulu when we asked them to draft a constitution; we should talk about Manila, when we asked them to elect a President; we should talk about Guam, when Ky and Thieu gave us their constitution; we should talk about the election of a Constitutional Assembly; and finally, we should talk about Thieu and Ky's election.

We should make speeches about the new government out there, and should show what has happened in your period as Secretary of State.

We need to get a program on speeches.

MR. ROSTOW: State is working with Harold Kaplan on this matter. We believe the Inaugural will be a turning point.

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